BUILDING A STAGE BIGGER THAN ROME'S MIGHTIEST ARENA

Platform for Production of Four-Night Stand Drama Will Cover 126,000 Square Feet---Three times Larger Than Famed and Ancient Colosseum's Stage

STRAUSS PORTRAIT.

The ancients have been outdone again. History tells of the mighty works of the men of Rome, Greece and Egypt and guides of Europe "point with pride" to works which they call the wonders of the world. They tell of the gigantic stages the ancients built and the mighty amphitheaters and defy the moderns to show anything like them.

While the guides were talking to the winter tourists in Europe, a few hard-headed stay-at-home Americans got together last winter and planned the biggest stage ever built to accommodate the biggest theatrical troupe in history to play before an audience which will sit on the slopes of a natural amphitheater and hear 7,500 actors recount the deeds of the men who built their city.

The play will be given in Forest Park, St. Louis, on the former World's Fair grounds. Instead of being used for the slaughter of martyrs to the lions and for gladiatorial combats as the arena of the famous Colosseum of Rome was used, the stage for the Pageant and Masque of St. Louis will be the gathering of peaceful clans showing the history of the city from the time of the Mound Builders to the present.

The stage will be larger than any of the modern-day stages. The New York Hippodrome auditorium and stage together could be placed upon the stage now under construction in Forest Park at the foot of Art Hill, and there would be still room. The area of the stage is 126,000 square feet. The area of the arena of the famed Colosseum of ancient Rome is estimated at 42,150 square feet. The dimensions of the Colosseum seats and all are 515x612 feet. The dimensions of the Forest Park stage are 200x 580 feet.

The Pageant and Masque will be given May 28, 29, 30 and 31.

In this play there will be 10,000 players—the greatest cast in the history of the theater. That is to say, the Cast Committee has enrolled about 10,000 men, women and children to take part.

It is anticipated that only about 7,500 of the 10,000 performers to be enrolled will be needed at each performance. But it will be necessary to have available understudies in case of sickness or inability of the regular players to take part in any of the performances.

CALLED MOST WONDERFUL OF NATURAL THEATERS.

Those who have seen the site upon which will be held the Pageant and Masque of Saint Louis have pronounced it the greatest and most wonderful of all natural theaters.

There will be a river 125 feet wide between the stage and the audience and the stage proper will be 580 feet wide and 200 feet deep.

"A World Site," Percy MacKaye, famous poet-dramatist, calls the location selected for the stage.

It is a world site, Mr. McKaye said, because no other city possesses a natural amphitheater of all the extraordinary advantages to be found at Art Hill. No city has within its borders an outdoor theater so large, so beautiful, and so convenient. Lorado Taft, the eminent sculptor of Chicago; Professor Burton of the University of Minnesota; Alfred Noyes, the English poet, and others versed in the art of pageantry who have recently seen the Art Hill site are enthusiastic in their praise of it and proclaim it ideal for the purpose for which it is to be used next May.

This is the first time in history that a drama has ever been presented on so large a scale.

Upon the slopes of the hill, thousands upon thousands of seats will be constructed, where the gentle rise of the ground is just sufficient to make each row of seats exactly the right height above the row in front. Thanks to Mother Nature, there need be no craning of necks to see every movement that is being made upon the stage.

Seated in these tiers of benches, the spectators will be in a position to view the re-enactment of the city's romantic history precisely as if through the last 150 years they had occupied a point of vantage on the Illinois shore, where they could watch in comfort the unfolding of the absorbing events which have culminated in building up the big Missouri town.

The curved apron of the stage will leave between the spectators and the players a strip of water minutely corresponding to the bend in the Mississippi as it flows past St. Louis. Upon this mimic Mississippi will take place, with exceptional realism, the many important episodes which have made the river play so important a part in the upbuilding of the city of Pierre Laclede's founding.

There are enough romantic facts connected with this stage to make it fine material for a play in itself.

When completed, it will be worthy to rank as the long-sought eighth wonder of the world. It will be so large that all of the stages of the first-class theaters in St. Louis could be placed in one corner. It will be almost two ordinary city blocks in width at the rear, and will be semi-circular in shape in front, the diameter nearest the audience being about one ordinary city block across.

Near the rear will be an immense pit, in which will be hidden the band of 100 pieces and a chorus of several hundred voices. A great sounding board, 40 feet high, is to be erected immediately behind this pit, so that no note of the music will be lost to the audience.

When it is considered that this great platform will be constructed over the waters of the lagoon, some of the difficulties in store for the builders will be made apparent. It must be made strong enough to hold the 7,500 performers, and still light enough so that it may readily be torn away and the lagoon given back to the city unimpaired in beauty.

TROOPS OF HORSES WILL CROSS BOARDS.

Troops of horses will gallop across the boards, adding to the already tremendous strain put upon the flooring by the tons of weight of the performers themselves.

No such stage was ever before constructed. No such stage was ever before conceived. The ancient Greeks, who made of the out-of-door drama one of their finest arts, undoubtedly would gape in a highly unclassical way at the impressive manner in which St. Louis is preparing to stage its Pageant and Masque.

As many persons as are ordinarily employed in a big theatrical company will be at work for more than two months building this platform. It will be in use for not more than a week.

Then it will be torn down again. Its cost and trouble is to be paid for by enhanced civic pride.

Not only must the stage itself be made ready, but on the plain just behind it must be placed inconspicuously, but still conveniently, the houses which will be used as dressing rooms, and as a storing place for the properties and costumes.

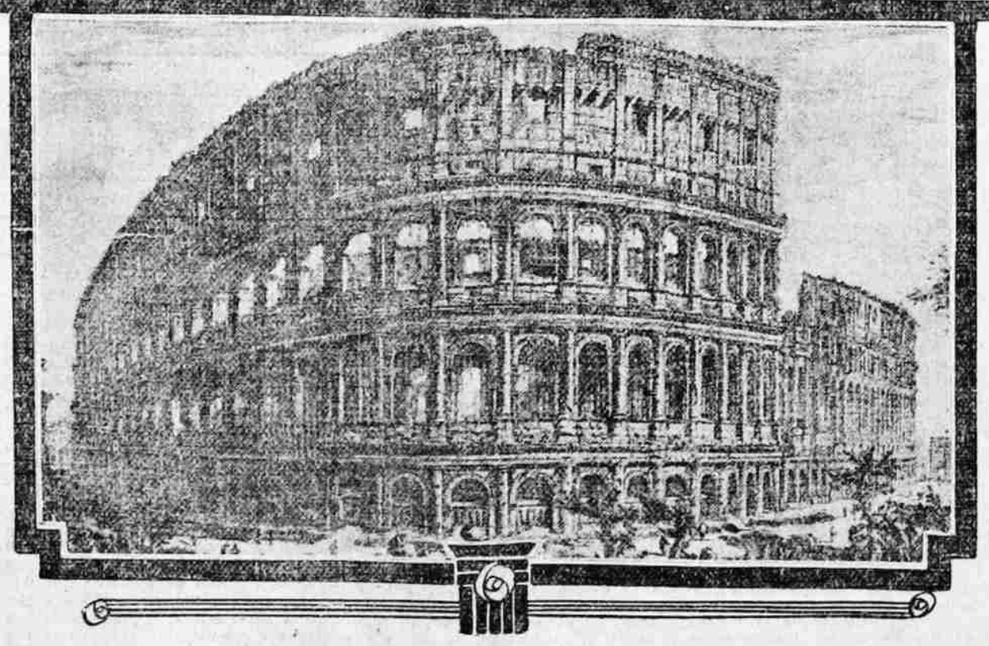
Tents will be used for this purpose as far as possible, but some of the properties to be displayed on the stage are extremely valuable, both in money and in historic association. These must be safely guarded from water, fire and from vandals.

Just behind the stage there is a double row of trees, which will effectively screen from view the undecorative but highly necessary tent city.

There will be an encampment of 7,500 persons, which is a greater number than is found at any army post in the usual course of events. There must be quarters, in addition, for a battalion of call boys, electricians, stage carpenters, assistant stage managers, and general factotums.

Many interesting novelties in handling the light effects and other features of the production will be included in the equipment of the stage, the details of which are being worked out by Joseph Lindon Smith, who is to be the producer, in association with MacKaye, of the poetic Masque.

The great size of the stage, and the number of people concerned, make new methods necessary in arranging details of the stage.



UPPER left, from left to right—Percy Mackaye, author of the Masque; Joseph Lindon Smith, stage manager of the Masque; Thomas Wood Stevens, author and stage manager of the Pageant, working on the model of the stage. Upper right—William W. LaBeaume, chairman of the Productions Committee of the Pageant and Masque. Center—The stage in process of construction, as seen from Art Hill. Below—The Roman Coliseum.

The stage itself is only one of the many important details necessary in the preparation of the play. But from the extraordinary character of the platform, the fact that it is unique in history and is undoubtedly the pioneer, in its details, of a new form of stage craft, lends an interest and a zest to its construction which would not attend the prosaic building of an ordinary stage.

COLOSSEUM SCENE OF DEATHS OF MARTYRS.

The Colosseum, which was the scene of so many Christian martyrdoms, has recently been explored and excavations have revealed its mammoth size. The external elevation of the Colosseum consisted of four stages, each adorned with engaged columns of three orders of Greek architecture. The lowest three were arcaded, having eighty columns and as many arches. Those of the basement story served as entrances, seventy-six being numbered and allotted to the general body of spectators, while four, at the extremities of the building were the principal entrances.

The interior was divided into the arena and what was called the cavea.

The arena usually was of the same shape as the amphitheater. That is, it was built in the form of an ellipse and was totally surrounded by tiers of seats for the spectators. The present day stadiums and coliseums have been modeled after the great amphitheater of Rome and the outdoor theaters of Greece.

In the Colosseum there were three galleries separated from each other by terraces and walls. The lowest was appropriated to the equestrian order. They correspond to the present day box seats. They were open to the sky but covered shelters were provided in the rear to which the occupants could retreat in case of rain. Other spectators sat in the higher galleries.

The height of the Colosseum is given as being from 160 to 180 feet. The seats in the interior do not rise higher than the level of the third order of the exterior, that is, about half the entire height of the building. It is believed there were seats higher up at one time and that they were destroyed. There is no sign of them now in the ruins.

A large awning was provided for the Colosseum and was drawn over the building when the sun shone. Sometimes when an Emperor wished to make a great display he had silken awnings above the great structure. The great height of the building was needed for purposes of obtaining ventilation. It is calculated that the known seats in the Colosseum could accommodate 87,000 spectators. Such a crowd would hardly be able to exist without extraordinary means of ventilation.

The shows in the Colosseum were cruel and bloody for the most part and with the rise of Christianity the buildings were discontinued. Before the reign of Constantine, however, they were built all over the provinces of Rome on smaller scale than the mammoth building at Rome. When the buildings fell into disuse they gradually fell into ruin.

There will be no mighty building in Forest Park for the production of the Pageant and Masque. The performance will begin in the afternoon and will be carried on into the night.

Don't Leave the Receiver Off the Hook.

What is a "permanent signal?"

Every telephone subscriber ought to know, for generally it means trouble on a telephone line—trouble which users of the service themselves can usually prevent if they will make sure that the receiver is always placed firmly on the hook when the telephone line is not in use.

Yes, that's it! When you forget to replace your telephone receiver firmly on the hook after a conversation is completed it causes a "permanent signal"—a small electric light—to burn in front of the operator at the central office switchboard, and she must report the line out of order. No one can reach you during that time because the operator is unable to ring your bell.

Often the receiver is left off through carelessness, but more frequently a book or some other obstruction directly beneath the receiver prevents it from bringing down the hook firmly.

As a matter of fact, the service was interrupted on 30,000 Bell subscribers' lines in Philadelphia last month through their failure to replace the receiver securely upon the hook after completing a conversation.

Perhaps there is no more convincing way of gauging the effect of leaving a telephone receiver off the hook than by taking a half-hour trip through one of the big central offices in this city. There you will see the switchboards, which are studded with thousands of tiny electric lights which glow whenever a subscriber lifts his receiver to make a call.

When he fails to replace the receiver it is like failing to close an eye in sleep. There stares that little unblinking gleam of light despite the operator's efforts to reach the subscriber and shut it off.

The operators can neither signal the subscriber to tell him about it nor connect any one who calls. So a black cord is connected to the line and the wire chief is notified that it is out of order.

Ninety-three per cent of the service interruptions which he must correct are due to this cause. Many repairmen are kept busy performing this simple and perhaps unnecessary work—replacing subscribers' telephone receivers upon the hooks.

Strong Evidence.

"This girl is only a college flirt. How do you know that she really loves you?"

"She dyes her hair to conform with my class colors, dad. A fellow couldn't ask for any greater proof of devotion than that."—Judge.